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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002746

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SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR: STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS  
NOVEMBER 17-DECEMBER 24

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2742  
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2378  
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2289  
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2265  
[1](#)E. NEW DELHI 2223  
[1](#)F. NEW DELHI 2146  
[1](#)G. NEW DELHI 2109  
[1](#)H. NEW DELHI 1799  
[1](#)I. NEW DELHI 1684

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Pushpinder Dhillon for Reasons 1.4  
(B and D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: After weeks of consideration and consultations, the Election Commission finally decided to hold state assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir in seven phases over a five week period starting November 17. Results will be announced on December 28. Most of the political parties welcomed the announcement. The separatists were quick to vigorously denounce the elections and call for a boycott. The long, rolling seven-phase election schedule reflects the enormous challenges posed by security concerns, the weather and staffing and logistics needs. The Election Commission acknowledged the risk in was taking in holding elections early. It appears to have calculated that the security situation has improved enough to warrant the risk instead of leaving a political vacuum in the state for a long period. End Summary.

#### Rolling Election Schedule

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[1](#)2. (U) The Election Commission put to rest weeks of intense speculation on October 19 when it announced that state assembly elections would take place in Jammu and Kashmir in seven phases over the five week period between November 17 and December 24. In all there are 6.5 million voters in the state. They will be choosing legislators for 87 assembly seats in a first-past-the post election. Counting of the votes and announcement of results will be on December 28.

[1](#)3. (U) Due to the threat of severe weather in Leh and Kargil as it gets deeper into the winter season, these districts will be the first to go to the polls, in the first phase on November 17. Srinagar and Jammu will be the last, on December 24.

November 17: Bandipora, Leh, Kargil, Poonch-Haveli  
November 23: Ganderbal, Rajouri  
November 30: Kupawara  
December 7: Baramulla, Budgum, Reasi, Udhampur  
December 13: Pulwara, Shopian, Kulwara  
December 17: Kulgam, Anantnag, Kishtwar, Doda and Ramban

December 24: Srinagar, Jammu, Samba

¶4. (SBU) The rolling seven-phase election schedule for the state is unprecedented. It reflects the enormous challenges posed by security concerns, the weather and staffing and logistics needs. In the past, elections have been staged in four phases. The stretched schedule this time means that the state administrative and security machinery will be completely preoccupied for about six weeks in the November-December timeframe. Since elections are also scheduled in several other states during the same time period, Jammu and Kashmir has to compete with the other states for security forces and administrative support.

#### EC Recognizes Risk

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¶5. (U) In announcing the elections, Chief Elections Commissioner N. Gopalswami acknowledged that the EC was taking a risk in moving forward with elections this year as opposed to postponing them. He said the uncertainty arises from the warning by some "parties and other outfits" that they would boycott the elections.

#### Most Political Parties Welcome Announcement

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¶6. (U) The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) immediately welcomed the announcement, with President Rajnath Singh saying the decision is a "milestone in the democratic history" of the state. He was confident his party would do

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well because of the "failures" of the United Progressive Alliance. Although there had been divided opinion within the Congress Party on the advisability of elections in the state this year, the party welcomed the announcement and its spokesman said it is prepared for elections. National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah, whose party has played an equivocating role on early election dates, said he is glad the suspense is over, the party cannot say no to elections and will begin preparing for them.

#### Silence From PDP

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¶7. (C) There was no public reaction from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which has argued sharply against early elections. PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti acknowledged to PolOff in September that her party would not fare well if elections were held this year because of its perceived role in the land use controversy that led to the unrest in the valley this year. Mufti believes the political environment needs some space to heal from the tension and unrest of the past summer. Should the PDP choose to sit out the polls, it would further weaken the credibility of the election as the PDP is one of the two valley-based mainstream political parties.

#### Separatists Denounce Announcement

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¶8. (U) Separatists across the board immediately came out against the elections. All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Mirwaiz Farooq said the APHC will urge the electorate not to vote. In his view, elections are pointless in the absence of settlement of the "larger Kashmir conflict." Hardliner Syed Ali Gilani said: "We want no elections in Kashmir." The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front leader Yasin Malik said his organization would engage in a "full-fledged boycott campaign."

#### Model Code of Conduct in Force

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¶9. (U) Hours before the EC announcement of poll dates, the Jammu and Kashmir Government announced a reshuffle of key

administrative officials including replacement of the Home Secretary. Had the state government waited until the EC announcement, it would not have been allowed to make the changes because the EC also put into immediate effect its "Model Code of Conduct," which prohibits the government from taking any major policy or program actions that are intended to influence the electorate. The code also specifies in detail the strict funding and campaigning rules to be followed by the contestants. Given the communal unrest in the state this summer over the Amarnath land use controversy (reftels), the EC highlighted the following excerpt from the model code of conduct: "There shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes. Mosques, Churches, Temples or other places of worship shall not be used as forum for election propaganda."

Comment: Early Election Arguments Won

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¶10. (SBU) In the end, near consensus appears to have developed among the political parties and within the GOI that the security situation had improved enough to warrant taking the risk of holding elections early instead of pushing them to next year. The EC appears to have been swayed by the argument of those who said that the absence of an elected government in the state for such a long period would create a political vacuum which would help the separatists and their agenda. Proponents of early elections have also argued that to postpone election would be viewed as the Indian state "caving in" to the separatists and the jihadis. The EC may also have calculated that while the political environment in the state is complex, today's complexities will not necessarily go away if elections were to be postponed.  
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